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THE COMPETITION FOR ERZERUM
1914-1921

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The turbulent years of World War I and its immediate aftermath placed the future status of Erzerum in question. As the strategic center and crossroads of the Armenian Plateau, Erzerum—historic Karin—figured in the calculations of all the players of the great game: Ottoman and Turkish rulers, Russian imperial and Soviet strategists, Allied and American policymakers, and, of course, the Armenian leaders themselves.

Erzerum became an integral part of the Armenian Question in the nineteenth century, during which the fortress city was occupied and relinquished twice by the Russian armies. As the Russian military withdrew after each peace treaty, there followed in its train thousands of Armenians who forsook their native towns and villages for the prospect of a more secure existence in a Christian empire. The emergent Armenian resistance movement elicited by the failure of domestic and international plans and promises for reforms found fertile soil in the plain of Karin/Erzerum. In the last in a series of reform measures, in 1895 and again in 1914, the city of Erzerum was designated as the center of a European-supervised administrative region, unofficially an Armenian province. In the first instance, it was Sultan Abdul-Hamid II who acquiesced in European pressure to promulgate the reforms but in fact effectively subverted them by unleashing the massacres of 1895-96. In the second instance, it was the Young Turk (Ittihad ve Terakki) government that had assumed power in 1908 which was constrained in February 1914 to assent to the formation of two administrative regions in the eastern provinces, each with a European inspector-general. Again, Erzerum was selected as the center of one of the inspectorates,

encompassing the provinces (*vilayets*) of Trebizond, Erzerum, and Sivas (Sebastia/Sepastia).¹

These externally-imposed stipulations only served to heighten the anxieties of the Turkish rulers regarding possible loss of the eastern provinces. This fear redoubled with the military fiasco and the further territorial losses in the first Balkan War in 1912-13, as the Young Turk leaders began to view Anatolia and the Armenian Plateau as the last "fall back" position for the empire. It was therefore an area that had to be cleansed of Armenians and any other elements that might someday try to follow the example of the Balkan peoples or provide an excuse for further foreign intervention.²

This resolve became all the more emphatic in the summer of 1914 when representatives of the world congress of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutiun*) which was meeting in Erzerum gave evasive answers to proposals of a Young Turk delegation, headed by central committee members Behaeddin Shakir, Omer Naji, and Hilmi Bey, to incite the Armenians of the Caucasus against the Russians in the likely event of hostilities between the Ottoman and Russian empires. The Armenian spokesmen urged the Turkish leaders not to be drawn into an imperialistic European conflict, stating that in such an unfortunate eventuality the Ottoman Armenians would do their duty as loyal citizens, just as they had done during the Balkan wars. It was impossible, however, to foment a rebellion in the Caucasus.³

¹ See Roderic H. Davison, "The Armenian Crisis, 1912-1914," *American Historical Review* 53 (April 1948): 489-505; André Mandelstam, *Le sort de l'empire Ottoman* (Paris and Lausanne: Payot, 1917), pp. 215-45.

² See, for example, the paper by Taner Akcam, "Rethinking the Ottoman Archival Material: Debunking Existing Myths," in the conference, "Contextualizing the Armenian Experience in the Ottoman Empire: From the Balkan Wars to the New Turkish Republic," University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, March 7-10, 2002.

³ Vahan Minakhorian, *1915 tvakane* [The Year 1915] (Venice: Mekhitarist Press, 1949), pp. 66-71; Leo [Arakel Babakhanian], *Tiurkahay heghapokhutian gaghaparanutiune* [The Ideology of the Turkish Armenian Revolution], vol. 2 (Paris: Bahri, 1935), pp. 76-78; Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi* [The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question] (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1950), pp. 589-90; Johannes Lepsius, *Der Todesgang des Armenischen Volkes* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1930), pp. 178-79.

Erzerum during World War I

The entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I as an ally of the German Empire in October 1914 sealed the fate of the final reform program and of the Armenians themselves. A secret German-Turkish treaty in August had committed the Ottoman Empire to war against Russia in return, inter alia, for the annexation of certain territories in the Caucasus. The German alliance fired the imaginations of Young Turk leaders such as Minister of War Enver Pasha. Enver devised a scheme to catch the Russian defenses off-guard by striking across the international frontier in the dead of winter and seizing the fortress of Kars en route to Baku in the eastern Caucasus. He traveled to Erzerum to direct the campaign of the Third Army personally and disregarded the advice of his staff officers and commanders who warned of the dire consequences of a winter operation.

The failure of the Sarikamish campaign at the end of December 1914 and early January 1915 cost Enver Pasha some 80,000 casualties in three army corps and the initiative on the Caucasus front.⁴ He returned to Constantinople embittered and in search of scapegoats. The fact that four Armenian volunteer battalions, organized in the Caucasus and composed largely of Ottoman Armenians, assisted the Russian armies could not have escaped his attention. The first battalion under the veteran partisan leader Andranik (Ozanian) was with the Russian forces in northern Persia, while the third and fourth battalions commanded by Hamazasp (Srvandztian) and Keri (Arshak Gavafian) operated on the front facing Erzerum between Sarikamish and Olti. What was more, the Armenian member of the Ottoman Parliament from Erzerum, Garegin Pasdermajian (Armen Garo), had gone over to

⁴ W.E.D. Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 240-41, 251-76, 283-84; Nikolai G. Korsun, *Sarykamyskaia operatsiia na Kavkazskom fronte mirovoi voiny v 1914-1915 godu* [The Sarikamish Operation on the Caucasus Front during the World War in the Years 1914-1915] (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1937), pp. 19-62, 78-93; Maurice Larcher, *La guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale* (Paris: E. Chiron, 1926), pp. 385-89; Felix Guse, *Die Kaukasusfront im Weltkrieg, bis zum Frieden von Brest* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1940), pp. 39-52.

the Russians and helped to organize the second battalion of Dro (Drastamat Kanayan), which was poised in Igdir for an advance on Van.⁵

The unfolding of the Armenian Genocide in the city and plain of Erzerum began in May 1915. The villages in particular were subjected to ferocious massacre, whereas the caravans from the city experienced a mixture of outright massacre and deportation toward the Syrian desert. When a Russian offensive in 1916 succeeded in capturing Hasankale in January and then the fortress of Erzerum itself on February 16, there were few Armenians left in the region. The Armenian quarters and villages, completely plundered, stood abandoned. Enver Pasha prepared for a counter-offensive in the spring of 1916 by concentrating ten divisions of the Second and Third Ottoman armies in the Malatia-Kharpert-Diarbekir quadrant, but the campaign was foiled because of the lack of provisions resulting from the deportations and despoliation of the land and the successful Russian thrust and capture of the coastline up to Trebizond in April. Then in July, the Russian armed forces, supported by an Armenian battalion, expanded from Erzerum into the western districts of the province—Baiburt (Baberd), Mamakhatun (Derjan), Kghi, and Erzinjan (Erznka).⁶

The Russian foremarch stirred new hopes among the Armenians, including the thousands upon thousands of refugees who had fled to Russian territory from Erzerum, Alashkert (Alashgerd), Bayazit (Bayazed), and Van. But much to their amazement, the tsarist authorities in the Caucasus prevented them from returning home. What was more, orders were soon issued to disband the Armenian volunteer battalions. The motives for these bewildering actions became clear only later, in 1918, when the

⁵ For details, see General Gavriil Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens à la guerre mondiale sur le front du Caucase, 1914-1918* (Paris: n.p., 1927). See also Simon Vratzian [Vratsian], *Kianki ughinerov: Depker, demker, aprumner* [Along Life's Ways: Episodes, Figures, Experiences], 6 vols. (Cairo: Houssaper, and Beirut: Hamazkayin Press, 1955-1966), vol. 3, pp. 21, 27-37.

⁶ Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, pp. 331-62, 378-83, 400-27; Guse, *Die Kaukasusfront*, pp. 75-88; Larcher, *La guerre mondiale*, pp. 399-402; E.V. Maslovskii, *Mirovaia voina na Kavkazskom fronte, 1914-1917 g.* [The World War on the Caucasus Front, 1914-1917] (Paris: Vozrozhdenie-La Renaissance, 1933), pp. 267-93, 326-30, 362-403.

secret wartime treaties concluded between imperial Russia and its Entente allies, Great Britain and France, were made public by the new Soviet government. By the terms of those agreements, the Ottoman Empire was at last to be dismembered, apportioned for the most part among the three Entente powers. Russia was to expand westward to incorporate the provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van, while France was to gain direct or indirect control over Sivas, Kharpert, and Diarbekir, together with Cilicia as part of French-dominated "Greater Syria," and Britain, in addition to Egypt, was to take possession of the oil-rich lands of Mesopotamia and other zones of economic exploitation in the Near East.⁷ Hence, once the Russian armies had occupied the territories marked for tsarist annexation, there was no further need to foster Armenian national sentiment or aspirations. Rather, the Armenian volunteer battalions were to be dissolved. At the same time, the Viceroy for the Caucasus, Grand Duke Nicholas Romanov, clamped renewed censorship on the Armenian press and circumscribed the activities of Armenian civic organizations.⁸ Meanwhile, plans were being drawn up in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) to transfer Cossacks from South Russia to the new expanded borders in "Turkish Armenia."⁹

The heavy concentration of the Russian armed forces in the eastern Ottoman provinces made it clear that when weather and ground conditions permitted, a renewed offensive in the spring

⁷ See [U.S.S.R.], Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, *Razdel Aziatskoi Turtsii po sekretnym dokumentam b. ministerstva inostrannykh del* [Partition of Asiatic Turkey According to the Secret Documents of the F(ormer) Ministry of Foreign Affairs], ed. Evgenii A. Adamov (Moscow: Izdanie Litizdata NKID, 1924).

⁸ Karo Sasuni [Garo Sassouni], *Tajkahayastane Rusakan tirapetutian tak (1914-1918)* [Turkish Armenia under Russian Domination (1914-1918)] (Boston: Hairenik, 1927), pp. 108-09; *Hamarot teghekagir H. Azgayin Biuroyi gordsunetian, 1915-1917* [Summary Report on the Activities of the A(rmenian) National Bureau, 1915-1917] (Tiflis, 1917), pp. 8-9; Republic of Armenia, Archives of the Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, File 1/1, cited hereafter as Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives.

⁹ Ashot Hovhannisian, comp., "*Hayastani avtonomian*" *ev Antantan: Vaveragreri imperialistakan paterazmi shrjanits* ["The Autonomy of Armenia" and the Entente: Documents from the Period of the Imperialistic War] (Erevan: Petakan Hratarakchutyun, 1926), pp. 77-79; Gabriel Lazian, *Hayastan ev Hai Date (Vaveragreri)* [Armenia and the Armenian Question (Documents)] (Cairo, Houssaper, 1946), pp. 199-200; *Razdel Aziatskoi Turtsii*, Appendix III, pp. 360-62.

of 1917 would strike to overwhelm the hard-put Turkish armies. But this action was preempted by the unanticipated Russian revolution in March 1917, which resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the end of the three-century reign of the Romanov dynasty. The near bloodless coup was hailed worldwide by the champions of democracy who placed high hopes on a caretaker administration known as the Provisional Government. Although that government was faced with insurmountable problems, it did lift many of the restrictions that had been imposed on the population and especially the subject nationalities. In the Caucasus, the Viceroy was recalled and the prohibition on repatriation lifted. During the summer of 1917, thousands of Armenian refugees streamed back to their homes in the Russian-occupied territories extending from Erzinjan and Erzerum to Van. The Armenian peasantry enthusiastically hastened to sow their fields, believing that the time of deliverance had finally arrived. The favorable prospect of Armenian self-government under a democratic Russian federative system seemed to be confirmed when Dr. Iakov Zavrieff (Hakob Zavrian), a prominent Armenian public figure, was appointed as assistant in civil affairs to the general in command of the occupied territories, headquartered in Erzerum. Armenian officials were in turn named throughout the region, with Aram Manukian directing the repatriation and administration in Van.¹⁰

This period of optimism was tinged with growing anxiety, however, as the defeatist propaganda disseminated by Bolshevik agents spread rapidly through the Russian ranks. By the end of summer the Caucasus front, which had been held by more than 200,000 front line and reserve troops, was jeopardized by massive desertion of the Russian peasant-soldiers, who were captivated by the Bolshevik slogan, "peace, land, bread." In an attempt to strengthen the thinning front, Armenian leaders persuaded the Provisional Government under Alexandre Kerensky

¹⁰ Simon Vratzian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian* [Republic of Armenia] (Paris: Navarre, 1928), pp. 24-25; Sasuni, *Tajkahayastane*, pp. 141-43; Aramays N. Mnatsakanyan, *V.I. Lenine ev hay zhoghovrdi azatagrakan paikare* [V.I. Lenin and the Armenian People's Struggle for Liberation] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1963), pp. 224-25.

to authorize the transfer to the Caucasus thousands of Russian Armenian soldiers serving in the European theater. That movement had only just begun, however, when in November the Bolsheviks staged the second revolution of 1917, overthrowing the Provisional Government and giving rise to the bloody four-year Russian Civil War.¹¹

The establishment of a Soviet government in Petrograd and Moscow evoked denunciations from the whole of the Caucasus region, except for the proletarian sector of Baku. Georgian, Armenian, and Muslim leaders responded by creating in Tiflis the Transcaucasian Commissariat as a caretaker executive, followed in February 1918 by a provisional legislature, the Seim, to manage affairs pending the liquidation of the Bolshevik "adventure" and restoration of the "democratic" government of all-Russia. The Commissariat worked through the still-loyal Russian army command in the Caucasus to establish a truce with the Ottoman army in December 1917, according to which each side would remain in place along a demarcation line extending from the Black Sea to a point west of Erzinjan and then curving southeastward and passing between Bitlis and Van.¹²

The Russian command, unable any longer to take responsibility for the front, also authorized the formation of the Armenian Army Corps composed of Armenians taken from the regular Russian army and Western Armenian partisan and militia units. General Foma Nazarbekov (Tovmas Nazarbekian) took command, assisted by Dashnakist stalwart Dro as the civilian commissar. The corps was made up of three sub-strength divisions under General Grigorii Areshov (Grigor Areshian), Colonel Moisei Silikov (Movses Silikian), and Western Armenian hero General Andranik Ozanian. Regiments of the first and third divisions were assigned to defend the Erzinjan-Baiburt-Erzerum sector.¹³

¹¹ Garegin Pasdermadjian, *Why Armenia Should Be Free* (Boston: Hairenik, 1918), p. 35; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 379/1.

¹² [Republic of Georgia], *Dokumenty i materialy po vneshnei politike Zakavkaz'ia i Gruzii* [Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia] (Tiflis: Government Press, 1919), pp. 11-23, cited hereafter as *Dokumenty i materialy*.

¹³ Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens*, pp. 77-83; Antoine Poidebard, "Rôle militaire des Arméniens sur le front du Caucase après la défection de l'armée

But the charge to protect a front of more than 250 miles from the Black Sea to Van with only a few thousand replacements for the deserting Russian army was virtually impossible to execute. It was only a matter of time before the Turkish armed forces would move to reclaim the eastern provinces.

The calculation of Lenin to take Russia out of the world war as the only way to preserve the "spark of revolution" so that it might ignite a world revolution necessitated acquiescing in a harsh peace with Germany and its allies, including the Ottoman Empire. In negotiations culminating in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, Soviet Russia ceded a large part of the European provinces to Germany and Austria-Hungary. And, at Turkish insistence, the new government in Moscow not only agreed to the restoration of all occupied Ottoman territories but, from the prewar Russian side of the boundary, also relinquished the three districts of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. What was more, in a secret protocol, Russia pledged to disband the Armenian military contingents operating in the entire region.¹⁴ The protests of the Transcaucasian Commissariat and Seim that Soviet Russia was unrecognized and had no jurisdiction in the Caucasus went unheeded as the Turkish armies made preparations to march into the ceded territories.

Already, as the negotiations were proceeding in Brest-Litovsk, Ottoman Third Army commander, General Vehib Pasha, claiming that the Caucasian side had violated the truce and that Armenian bands were victimizing defenseless Muslim civilians, had ordered an advance on Erzinjan. General Kiazim Karabekir's divisions, striking from the direction of Kemakh, had nearly surrounded the town by February 13. The Armenian partisan leader Murad of Sivas (Sepastatsi Murad) attempted to persuade the Russian officers who were still in command to hold the city for a day or

russe (décembre 1917-novembre 1918)," *Revue des études arméniennes* 1:2 (1920): 150-51; Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, pp. 458, 462.

¹⁴ John Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk: The Forgotten Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1938), pp. 256, 405-06; Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del SSSR, *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR* [Documents of Foreign Policy of the USSR], vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politecheskoi literatury, 1957), pp. 199-200; Carl Mühlmann, *Das deutsch-türkische Waffenbündnis im Weltkrieg* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1940), pp. 190, 194.

two longer so that the Christian population could be evacuated, but that same evening the order for retreat was issued. The Armenian townsmen, having no time to make preparations, now fled into the freezing night with whatever they could carry. The disorderly throng trudging through deep snowdrifts was repeatedly ambushed by Kurdish bands so that by the time the soldiers and civilians reached Mamakhatun four days later, half of them had been killed or wounded or else had frozen to death or been severely frostbitten. The panic-stricken mass did not stop until it had reached Erzerum behind whose walls scurried thousands of refugees from a 50-mile perimeter.¹⁵ General Karabekir received messages of praise from Vehib Pasha and from Minister of War Enver Pasha, whose imagination once more flew beyond the eastern provinces to unification with the Turkic and Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and beyond.¹⁶

The fall of Erzinjan created a crisis among Armenian civilian and military circles as only 4,000 troops held the Erzerum line. There was a collective sigh of relief when Andranik arrived on March 3 with reinforcements of about a thousand men. But this was the very same day that far away at Brest-Litovsk these lands were signed away by Soviet Russia. On March 10, Enver Pasha triumphantly issued to the armed forces news of the treaty and instructed General Vehib Pasha to reoccupy all the eastern provinces as well as the districts of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum. Vehib immediately gave notice to the Caucasus army command that it must clear this entire region and that he was marching on Erzerum. By that time, General Karabekir's main force had concentrated to the east of Ashkale, only a short distance from the Armenian front line at Ilija on the western approach to the city.¹⁷

The offensive began the very next day, on March 11. As the Turkish army advanced from the west, Kurdish mounted partisans

¹⁵ *Dokumenty i materialy*, pp. 41-51, 59-61; Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, pp. 555-66; Sasuni, *Tajkahayastane*, pp. 155-58; Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, pp. 461-62; Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens*, pp. 94-98.

¹⁶ Feridun Kandemir, *Kâzım Karabekir* (Istanbul: Sinan Matbaası ve Neşriyet Fvi, 1948), pp. 153-54.

¹⁷ Joseph Pomiankowski, *Der Zusammenbruch des Ottomanischen Reiches* (Zurich and Leipzig: Amalthea-Verlag, 1928), p. 334; Kandemir, *Karabekir*, pp. 152-54.

attacked from north and south. The Armenian forces were no match, and on March 12 Andranik sounded the order for retreat as the uncontrollable flow of townspeople and refugees passed through the Kars gate leading eastward. As they departed, the Armenians killed many of the Muslim prisoners held in two homes in Erzerum and burned several Turkish villages on their route of retreat. On his entry into the city, Karabekir was overjoyed to find that some 400 canons and large guns and great stockpiles of military equipment, dynamite, and foodstuffs had been left intact.¹⁸

Armenian abandonment and Turkish reoccupation of Erzerum determined the fate not only of the plain of Karin/Erzerum but also of the whole of Turkish Armenia, which again became the scene of panic and flight. By early April 1918, the Turkish armed forces had retaken all of the Russian-occupied territories and pressed across the prewar frontier to Sarikamish and Novo-Selim on the approaches to the fortress of Kars. Negotiations between the delegations of the Ottoman Empire and the Transcaucasian Seim proved fruitless as the Turkish armies continued to advance. Kars capitulated on April 25, and less than three weeks later, on May 15, Alexandropol (Gumri) in the province of Erevan fell.

It was under these circumstances that the last-ditch Armenian resistance at the approaches to Erevan spared the only remaining Armenian city and may have contributed to Turkish acknowledgment of a rump, landlocked Caucasian Armenian republic that was declared at the end of May. That state, with only about 4,000 square miles of rocky terrain under its jurisdiction, was crammed with countless miserable refugees and led a most precarious existence until the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allied Powers on October 30 and Germany capitulated a few days later on November 11, 1918.¹⁹

¹⁸ Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, pp. 462-63; Korganoff, *La participation des Arméniens*, p. 108; *Dokumenty i materialy*, p. 93; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 1/1.

¹⁹ See Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), esp. pp. 157-202.

Erzerum and Armenian Desiderata

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire opened new vistas for the Armenian survivors and the suffocating Armenian republic. The Entente, which had expanded to become the Allied and Associated Powers, including the United States of America, had condemned the perpetrators of the genocide and pledged to punish the guilty parties, individually and collectively, to restore and rehabilitate the survivors, and to guarantee a secure national future for the Armenian people.²⁰ For a brief time, the Armenian world was buoyed up by euphoric optimism, but those who read carefully the terms of the Turkish surrender in the Mudros Armistice had cause for serious misgivings. The chief British negotiator, in gaining his government's primary objectives regarding waterways, fortifications, and prisoners of war, made concessions to the Ottoman delegation on other points such as the immediate withdrawal of the Turkish armed forces from the Armenian provinces. Thus, while the Turkish divisions in the Caucasus were required to pull back to Kars within six weeks and ultimately to the prewar international frontier, no firm provision was made to remove the Turkish military from Erzerum and the rest of the eastern provinces, which presumably the peace settlement would detach from the Ottoman Empire. In its final form, the Mudros Armistice simply reserved to the Allied Powers the right to occupy all or part of these provinces "in case of disorder."²¹ Hence, as many as 20,000 Turkish troops and irregulars were allowed to remain armed in the region of Erzerum. Failure to require immediate withdrawal was to raise major obstacles to Armenian repatriation and territorial expansion when so authorized by the Paris Peace Conference.

²⁰ See Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Allies and Armenia, 1915-18," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3:1 (1968): 145-55.

²¹ Minutes of the negotiations are in Great Britain, Public Record Office, Foreign Office Archives, 371/5259, E5732/5732/44, cited hereafter as FO. The terms of the Mudros Armistice are in Parliament, House of Commons, *Sessional Papers (Accounts and Papers)*, 1919, Cmd. 53, and in United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918*, Supplement 1: *The World War*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), pp. 441-43.

These disturbing realities notwithstanding, Armenians were confident that with Allied assistance they would emerge from the nightmare of war and massacres in a strengthened position. Many Armenians, especially the refugees and those living in Diaspora, envisaged a greater Armenia extending from the Caucasus and Black Sea to Cilicia and the Mediterranean Sea. The temporary capital at Erevan would surely be moved westward to the center of the homeland—the *erkir*—at either Erzerum or Van. When the issue of desiderata was put to the first legislative body of the Armenian republic, the Khorhurd, it displayed greater moderation, instructing the delegation departing for Paris to seek the unification of Russian Armenia with the six provinces of Turkish Armenia and secure access to the sea. There were a few voices that considered even this claim to be too ambitious and recommended being content with the Republic's incorporation of the three eastern vilayets of Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van.²² When the Republic's delegation arrived in Paris, however, Avetis Aharonian was quickly carried away by the sentiments of the diasporan Armenians as expressed by Boghos Nubar's National Delegation.

Aharonian joined Nubar in appearing before the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference in February 1919 to argue the case for a free and separate Armenian state stretching from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean Sea, reparations for the staggering wartime losses, and measures to rescue the thousands of abducted Armenian women and children. But staking claims and making good on them were quite different matters. The decimation of the Armenian menfolk and youth during the genocide heavily taxed the resources of the existing small army and limited its potential for taking by force what might be awarded by the peace conference. This rendered Armenia all the more dependent on external assistance and protection in making its way into the world as a permanent nation-state.²³

²² Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 74; Al. Khatisian, *Hayastani Hanrapetutian tsagumnu zargatsume* [The Creation and Development of the Republic of Armenia] (Athens: Nor Or, 1930), pp. 97-98; Vratzian, *Kianki ughinerov*, vol. 5, pp. 44-45.

²³ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 104a/3a; United States, Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919: The Paris Peace Conference*, 13 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942-1947), vol. 4, pp. 147-56, cited hereafter as *Paris Peace Conference*.

Throughout 1919, both Aharonian and Nubar and the Armenian government led by Alexandre Khatisian appealed for the means to begin the repatriation of the Armenian refugees, both to ease the crush of exposed, starving, disease-ridden exiles in the small existing state and to start the process of reconstruction by preparing the fallow fields before the sowing season had passed. Various plans were put forward for the repatriation in stages to the closest border districts, starting from Igdir to Bayazit and Van, and from Kars to Basen and Alashkert and then extending to the plain of Karin/Erzerum. American physician and relief official Dr. Clarence Ussher, who had witnessed the Armenian defense of Van in 1915, even traveled to Paris to push for a plan to repatriate the Armenians before the peace conference had rendered its decision on the final disposition of these territories. By his plan, which was supported by former U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, and other prominent figures then in Paris, the adult males would return first with seed grain and implements to sow the fields, the older boys and orphans would follow to harvest the first crop, and then after a few more months the women and children would join the men and rekindle their hearths. Ussher suggested that technically the operation could even be conducted under the auspices of the Ottoman government, which after the war would surely be anxious to show that it repudiated the crimes of the Young Turk regime and wished to make amends. While proponents of this and other such plans gained a sympathetic ear in certain American and British official circles, they failed to secure a commitment for Allied officers and a small military force to oversee the repatriation. Rather, the Allied director of worldwide relief, Herbert Hoover, manipulated the situation so as to circumvent any military obligations and instead had one of his staff members appointed merely to supervise relief efforts to aid the Armenians, meaning that the tens of thousands of refugees pressing along the frontiers would be unable to pass beyond the prewar Russo-Turkish boundary to get home.²⁴

²⁴ See Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, 4 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971-1996), vol. 1, pp. 295-312, vol. 2, pp. 40-61.

*Erzerum and the
Turkish Resistance Movement*

The Turkish surrender to the Allied Powers created grave fears and problems for thousands of persons who had participated in or benefited from the Armenian Genocide. The victorious nations were on record with the pledge to punish the perpetrators. Moreover, as everywhere else, countless Muslim native inhabitants and newcomer refugee *muhajirs* in Erzerum had taken possession of Armenian homes, lands, and goods and now faced the frightful prospect not only of having to vacate and return these properties but also of being compelled to leave the region entirely. It was not surprising, therefore, that local Ittihadist leaders and others who had the most to lose should initiate efforts to protect the area from Armenian expansion, insisting that a mere 600,000 Armenians would not be allowed to rule the majority Muslim population in the eastern provinces. In March 1919, member of the Ottoman Parliament Jevad Dursunoghlu was instrumental in summoning the organizational meeting in Erzerum of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Vilayets. The assembled Turkish and Kurdish notables declared that the eastern provinces had always been Muslim and Turk. The Armenians could find no historic identity here, for their claims to culture and civilization were based on a feudal system in a feudal time.²⁵

The Turkish resistance movement gained a strong champion in General Kiazim Karabekir, who in March 1919 was appointed commander of the XV Army Corps, with jurisdiction over the provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, and Van. Arriving in Erzerum in May, he immediately took control of the local defense organization, exclaiming: "There is nothing of Armenians here—the ruins of a few churches and nothing more. . . . There cannot and there will not be an Armenian government here." Rather, he boasted, "I shall take Armenia as a pawn. This is the key to

²⁵ Cevat Dursunoğlu, *Milli mücadelede Erzurum* [Erzerum in the National Struggle] (Ankara: n.p., 1946), pp. 19-20, 33-34, 143-44; M. Tayyib Gökbilgen, *Milli mücadelede başlarken: Mondros mütarkesinden Sivas Kongresine* [Beginnings of the National Struggle: From the Mudros Armistice to the Sivas Congress], vol. 1 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1959), pp. 74, 114-15.

securing for ourselves the favorable peace settlement that we desire."²⁶

In July, Karabekir was joined by General Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), who had managed to get himself appointed as inspector of the armies in the eastern provinces, including the XV Corps at Erzerum and the III Corps at Sivas, as a way to slip away from the watchful eyes of the Allied authorities in Constantinople. Although he and Karabekir immediately became rivals and competitors, they did collaborate to thwart the looming threat of Armenian expansion into the region. At a gathering convened on July 23 and subsequently memorialized as the "Erzerum congress," Karabekir urged the local notables "to smother the lust of the Armenians and Greeks to our lands and crush their hopes forever." He was miffed that Kemal was able to sway the delegates to be elected chairman but nonetheless joined in the formation of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia. The manifesto of the congress declared that the natural frontiers of the nation took in the entire provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, Sivas, Diarbekir, Kharput (Kharpert), Van, and Bitlis. All attempts to dismember any part of these lands would result in a Holy War—*Jihad*. Neither foreign protectorates nor mandates would be tolerated.²⁷

As the Turkish resistance movement began to take shape, General Karabekir played a double role: on the one hand, professing loyalty to the sultan in Constantinople and assuring Allied control officers that he was operating within the terms of the Mudros Armistice, while, on the other hand, circumventing the directives of the central government and British control mission that had arrived to oversee the removal and shipment out of the region of breechblocks from the heavy artillery as well as arms and ammunition in excess of the prescribed limits. He allowed

²⁶ Kâzım Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz* [Our War of Independence] (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1960), pp. 19-23, 44-45; Enver Behnam Şapolyo, *Kemal Atatürk ve milli mücadele tarihi* [Kemal Atatürk and the History of the National Struggle] (Istanbul: Rafet Zaimler Yayınevi, 1958), pp. 285-87.

²⁷ Dursunoğlu, *Milli mücadelede Erzurum*, pp. 63-69, 107-20, 151-54, 160-70; Şapolyo, *Kemal Atatürk*, pp. 226-30. See also the collection of articles without publisher or date, *Erzurum Kongresi ve Mustafa Kemâl Atatürk* [The Erzerum Congress and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk].

the first trainload of weapons to depart from Erzerum toward Sarikamish and Kars but secretly arranged for "partisans" to sever the rails near the frontier and help themselves to as much of the arms as they could cart away before he ordered the train back to Erzerum. He explained to the chief of the control mission, Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Rawlinson, that unfortunately the railway was inoperable and the route was impassible.²⁸

In June 1919, Brigadier General William H. Beach, chief of British military intelligence in the Caucasus, traveled to Erzerum to admonish Karabekir to cooperate and to caution him that he would be held responsible for the security of all roads in the area under his command. Karabekir professed his readiness to fulfill his obligations although, he claimed, he had received no directives from his government regarding the dismantling and exportation of arms. After Beach's departure, Rawlinson reported that the Turkish officers were no longer complying even ostensibly. A new trainload of munitions reached the border at Zivin in July, but now "rock slides" prevented further passage. Rawlinson's protests to Karabekir were met with the explanation that the local inhabitants were so disturbed by Armenian schemes to seize Turkish lands as far west as Sivas that they would not tolerate the movement of military matériel over Armenian-controlled territory, even if the weaponry was supposedly headed for the port of Batum to be sent to storage depots near Constantinople. He gave assurances that all arms and equipment would be safeguarded by him pending conclusion of the peace treaty. Colonel Rawlinson, expressing personal sympathy for the Turkish position and promising to do his utmost to retain Turkish sovereignty over Erzerum, tried to persuade Karabekir to comply with the stipulated arms limitations, but his coaxing and appeals were unavailing. In view of this impasse, the British senior commander in Constantinople, General George F. Milne, ordered the control mission to withdraw.²⁹

²⁸ Alfred Rawlinson, *Adventures in the Near East, 1918-1922* (London and New York: A. Melrose, 1923), pp. 163-234; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 359-60; Dursunoğlu, *Milli mücadelede Erzurum*, pp. 61, 73-74.

²⁹ FO 371/3659, 102537/512/58, FO 371/4158, 1026001/1201900/521/44; Rawlinson, *Adventures*, pp. 184, 190, 225-26, 230-31; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 42-43, 46, 87-89.

As Rawlinson prepared to leave at the beginning of August 1919, he was introduced to Mustafa Kemal, who gave notice that "any decision by the Peace Conference to allow Armenian Government any territory beyond the old Turco-Russian frontier would be met by a revolutionary army." In a detailed report submitted to his superiors, Rawlinson drew attention to the fact that many demobilized soldiers remained in the eastern provinces because of the lack of transportation, uncertain conditions in western Anatolia, and a natural desire to resist Armenian aggression: "The *greatest* inducement however has been the deserted state of the Eastern districts from which the pre-war population has absolutely *vanished* or a more correct description would perhaps be 'been exterminated'." Because barely 10 percent of the rural population was left, "the demobilized troops have found free houses and land at their disposal everywhere and the effect has been to produce a population which consists of a unique proportion of trained soldiers who are not only instinctively anti-Armenian, but are at the same time moved by the strongest inducement (i.e. their interest in retaining the properties they have squatted on) to resist any Armenian repatriation or any measure which might result in their losing the advantages they have gained." The entire Muslim population, Rawlinson continued, had been systematically armed, with some 100,000 rifles illegally distributed and the country abounding in concealed military caches. As recently as July, 160 machine guns sent from Erzerum overland to Trebizond by the control mission had "entirely disappeared." Rawlinson concluded that any plan to reduce the territory of Asiatic Turkey and cede any part of it to Armenia would require a sizable Allied military force and entail a "long and arduous undertaking."³⁰

Each passing month brought increased hope and encouragement to the Turkish Nationalists. These took a great leap in the summer of 1919 when it was announced that Great Britain would withdraw its armed forces from the Caucasus. British and Indian regiments had occupied strategic sites, especially along the railway and pipeline from Baku to Batum, at the end of 1918 as the Turkish armies evacuated the region and drew back to Kars

³⁰ FO 371/4158, 126001/521/44.

and then beyond the prewar border. The Armenians had attached high hopes to the arrival of these imperial contingents, believing that the enormous Armenian wartime losses and sacrifices would at last be compensated, especially as Turkey was a defeated enemy power and both of Armenia's Caucasian neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan, had been established with the support of Germany and Turkey, respectively. These calculations proved illusionary, however, as the primary objective of the British military was to maintain the status quo and a degree of order pending the Paris Peace Conference's rulings on the future of the region. Various proposals by Khatisian's government to have the British assist in the repatriation of Armenian refugees to Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van met with no success. Still, the proximity of the British armed forces to the Armenian republic at Erevan afforded a certain sense of security and reassurance. Now, even that was to be lost and, from the perspective of Karabekir and Kemal, the British will have left without either having disarmed the Turkish armies or repatriated the Armenians. Moreover, throughout the year Karabekir dispatched officers and small military echelons across the prewar frontier into the province of Kars and into the southern districts of Erevan province to encourage, train, and lead Muslim partisans in their struggle to reject the authority of the Armenian government. The Turkish general was careful at all times to list the officers and men on such missions as deserters or absent-without-leave in order to profess compliance with terms of the Mudros Armistice.³¹

The rivalries over the spoils of war among the victorious Allied Powers contributed to repeated delays in completing the treaty of peace with Turkey. Unlike traditional wars when treaties were signed on the field of battle or shortly after surrender, the Turkish treaty was ultimately imposed on the sultan's government almost two years after the end of the world war. This long interval proved critical for the formation and organization of the Turkish resistance movement, whose leaders adroitly exploited the obvious growing cracks among the Allies. In September 1919, Mustafa Kemal took the lead in broadening the resistance to a national movement, at least in name, when the Sivas congress

³¹ See Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 68-69, 109-39, 225-26.

created the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia, superseding the regional organization at Erzerum and dedicated to the preservation of the prewar Turkish boundaries in Europe and the eastern provinces.³² The immediate postwar gloom and fatalism were now giving way to a spirit of defiance.

The Mandate Question and U.S. Commissions

The fate of Erzerum and the entire Armenian Plateau rested in large measure on the ability of the Armenians to find a power to assist and strengthen the projected Armenian state until it could gather in its dispersed people and stand on its own. It was hoped that the United States, which had been so outspoken in condemnation of the wartime atrocities and which had a sustained record of missionary and educational work among the Armenians, might come forward as the protector or mandatory for the new Armenia. That was the wish of the European powers, too, especially as Russia was in the throes of revolution and civil war and it was undesirable that the eastern Ottoman provinces should come under Russian sway no matter which side won.

At the Paris Peace Conference, President Woodrow Wilson repeatedly indicated his personal sympathy for the Armenians and his hope that the people and Congress of the United States would be persuaded to reach out to Armenia. In fact, in the secret internal U.S. guidelines for the peace settlement, a large Armenian state, with Erzerum at its heart, was projected. But Wilson was an enigmatic leader, frequently changing positions and unwilling to strike hard on the Armenian issue. Hence, throughout 1919, the question of the future of Armenia was left in flux. Meanwhile, the Allied and Associated Powers imposed the harsh Treaty of Versailles on Germany and continued the drafting of the treaties with the other defeated enemy states of Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria. The Turkish treaty was thus left to the

³² Mahmut Goloğlu, *Sivas Kongresi* [The Congress of Sivas] (Ankara: Basnur Matbaası, 1969), pp. 61-112, 219-60; Mustafa Kemal, *A Speech Delivered by Ghazi Mustapha Kemal, President of the Turkish Republic, October 1927* (Leipzig: K.F. Koehler, 1929), pp. 57-133 *passim*.

last.

Armenophile organizations in the United States and Europe repeatedly joined Armenian spokesmen in Paris and London and the Armenian government in Erevan to urge that the Allied Powers take effective measures to resolve the Armenian Question. They protested that thousands of Armenians were dying while waiting to return to their native provinces and that the Turkish authorities were rapidly moving in Muslim settlers from the west and Kurdish tribesmen from the south to alter the demographic composition of the eastern provinces in order to deny the Armenians their rightful patrimony. General Karabekir in Erzerum was violating the Mudros Armistice, yet the Allied Powers, having reserved to themselves the right to occupy the region in case of disorder, remained inactive in face of this blatant defiance.

Instead of completing the draft of the Turkish treaty, for which ample materials had been gathered in Paris, London, and Washington, the peace conference stalled for time in 1919 by approving an American proposal to send a fact-finding mission to the Near East. But, even after that mission, led by Henry C. King, President of Oberlin College, and Charles R. Crane, a prominent industrialist friend of Woodrow Wilson and a trustee of Robert College in Constantinople, had completed its work and drafted its recommendations, President Wilson decided to dispatch a second mission to gather additional information that might be helpful should the United States decide to assume the mandate for Armenia.

The King-Crane commission, June-August 1919, concentrated on Syria and Palestine and did not travel to Erzerum, but it did receive spokesmen of all interested parties, including Armenian Patriarch Zaven Ter-Eghian (Der Yeghiayan) and other Armenian leaders in the Ottoman capital as well as in Aleppo and Cilicia.³³ In the portion of their report dealing with the non-Arab provinces, King and Crane confirmed the horrors of the Armenian deportations and massacres, declaring that "these crimes—

³³ See Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission: An American Inquiry in the Middle East* (Beirut: Khayat, 1963); United States, *Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 12, pp. 745-802.

black as anything in human history—cannot be simply forgotten and left out of account in seeking a righteous solution of the Turkish problem.” They recommended that, while the total dissolution of the Ottoman Empire should be rejected and Anatolia should be kept inviolable as a Turkish homeland, it was only just that a separate Armenian state be created because of the demonstrated unfitness of the Turks to rule over others, their lack of penitence for the massacres or repudiation of the crime, and their refusal to allow the repatriation and the restoration of goods and properties of the surviving Armenians. It was unreasonable to expect Armenians to live ever again under the oppressive Turkish yoke. Armenia should be awarded some part of the eastern Ottoman provinces but should be made relatively compact in order that the scattered Armenian people might gather in and become a majority in a short time. The new state should encompass the Russian Armenian districts around Erevan and approximately those parts of the Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van vilayets that had been occupied by the Russian armies in 1916. Here, the Armenians could attain a clear majority within five years. Although the state would be modest in size, its territory would be sufficient to ensure economic viability and give the Armenians both a geographic unity and defensible boundaries, thus reducing the responsibilities of a mandatory power and hastening the time for full Armenian self-government.³⁴

The King-Crane commission was followed by the second field inquiry, the American Military Mission to Armenia, led by Major General James G. Harbord. This large group included some sixty specialists in government and politics, geography and ethnography, military affairs, public and private finance, commerce and industry, public health and sanitation, agriculture and animal husbandry, the press, and other fields relevant to the responsibilities with which any mandatory power would have to be concerned. The records of the Harbord mission are extensive and, even now after decades, remain an impressive testimony to American organizational skill and thoroughness.³⁵

³⁴ *Paris Peace Conference*, vol. 12, pp. 810-48; Howard, *King-Crane Commission*, pp. 232-37.

³⁵ See the full records in United States, National Archives, Record Group 256,

Arriving in Constantinople from France at the beginning of September 1919, the mission set out on an overland journey of nearly a thousand miles, southeastward by railway through Asia Minor to Cilicia and Aleppo, then eastward to Mardin before turning northwestward by automobile and horseback to Diarbekir, Kharpert, Malatia, and Sivas, and from there eastward to Sushehir, Erzinjan, and Erzerum to beyond the prewar boundary into Kars and Erevan in the Republic of Armenia, and via Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Batum back to Constantinople a month later. All along the way, the mission saw the gruesome evidence of the Armenian Genocide. Harbord later recalled that he and his men "literally dreamed Armenia and Massacres."³⁶

Reaching Sivas on September 20, the group was accommodated at the American mission station, where it was learned that fewer than 20,000 of the original 200,000 Armenians of the province still survived and that many Armenian women and children remained confined against their will in Muslim households. General Harbord also met with Mustafa Kemal, who only a week earlier had presided over the Sivas congress. Kemal defined the Nationalist movement in anti-imperialistic Wilsonian terms and denied rumors of renewed persecutions of Armenian survivors, complaining instead about various schemes to dismember the Ottoman Empire and to award parts of Anatolia to Greeks and Armenians. He deplored the wartime massacres of Armenians but ascribed them to "a small committee which had usurped the government." The current Greek outrages at Smyrna, on the other hand, were occurring under the cover of an Allied fleet, and the "Erivan republic" was trying to exterminate the local Muslim population in a "wave of sanguinary savagery." He blamed the British for inciting the Armenians and Turks against each other as a pretext to occupy the entire area.³⁷

As the Harbord mission traveled eastward toward the border of the Erzerum vilayet, the telling signs of devastation and

File 184.021, cited hereafter as RG 256. See also Harbord's own account, "Investigating Turkey and Trans-Caucasia," *World's Work* 40 (May, June, July 1920): 35-47, 176-92, 271-80.

³⁶ Harbord, "Investigating" (May 1920): 36.

³⁷ RG 256, 184.021/93/96/242/243/247/250/255/257/258/259/263/282/329/342; Harbord, "Investigating" (May 1920): 44-47, and (June 1920): 176-80, 185-90.

depopulation became all the more evident. At Sushehir, two Armenians had the courage to state in the presence of Turkish officials that no Christians had escaped deportation or confinement in Muslim households and that few of the 500 people who had returned since the end of the war had been able to reclaim their goods and properties. In Erzinjan, two Armenians and a Greek priest remained mute as the Turkish authorities reported to Harbord that the prewar and postwar numbers of Armenians for the district were 16,000 and 500 as compared with 97,000 and 61,000 Turks. The American Military Mission was welcomed to Erzerum by local notables and XV Army Corps commander Kiazim Karabekir, who clearly was in charge. He took the party on a tour of the city, pointing to the rubble of two houses where he said the Armenians had burned a thousand Turks before their retreat in 1918. Armenian cruelty, he complained, was continuing, as 40,000 defenseless Muslims had recently been driven from their homes in districts just beyond the frontier. The Armenians had never formed a significant element in the eastern vilayets, in Erzerum city making up scarcely 5,000 of the 45,000 inhabitants and less than 10 percent in the province. The Erevan government had to abandon its imperialistic visions and seek an accord with the patriotic forces of Turkey or else face the consequences. When Harbord left Erzerum toward Sarikamish and Kars in Armenian territory, Karabekir wrote his military comrades that he was now more certain than ever that the Americans would not intervene in any way in Armenian-Turkish affairs.³⁸

After meeting Armenian military and government officials and gathering additional information in Kars and in Erevan, the American Military Mission to Armenia returned to Constantinople and then to France and on to the United States. Its records, numbering thousands of pages, were condensed into a primary report and twelve appendices. In the main document, General Harbord reviewed the history of Armenia, the record of persecution and broken promises since the 1870s, the prevailing condi-

³⁸ Harbord, "Investigating" (June 1920): 190-92; Harutiun H. Khachaturian, "Amerikian zinvorakan arakelutiune depi Hayastan" [The American Military Mission to Armenia], *Hairenik Amsagir* 19 (Jan. 1941): 130-32; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 302-05.

tions in Anatolia and Armenia, and the feasibility of and requirements for a mandate. A sense of outrage characterized his description of the deportations and massacres that had begun in 1915: "Mutilation, violation, torture, and death have left their haunting memories in a hundred beautiful Armenian valleys, and the traveler in that region is seldom free from the evidence of this most colossal crime of all the ages. . . . Conditions shriek of misery, ruin, starvation, and all the melancholy aftermath, not only of honorable warfare, but of bestial brutality unrestrained by God or man." The Paris Peace Conference, Harbord continued, had decided that Turkish rule over Armenia should end, but ethnographic and economic considerations complicated the situation. It was recommended, therefore, that the whole area from Constantinople to Transcaucasia be placed under a single mandatory power, in a federal type of system, with Armenia being one component until it was able to govern and defend itself. He concluded by listing reasons both for and against acceptance of a mandate.³⁹

In the report on geography and the boundaries of Armenia, Major Lawrence Martin proposed a relatively large Armenian state extending from Van to the Gulf of Alexandretta (Iskenderun) on the Mediterranean Sea but excluding Diarbekir and Sivas. If no mandatory power could be found, then the state should be made smaller so that the western boundary would extend from Van and Mush to a point on the Black Sea, leaving Erzerum in but Erzinjan out of the new Armenia.⁴⁰ Ironically, President Wilson did not use either the King-Crane or the Harbord report to advance the Armenian cause. The first was not made public until 1922, and the second was not released to Congress until April 1920, by which time the opponents of U.S. entanglements abroad had grown in strength and simply seized upon the listed difficulties for the mandatory power to turn them against Wilson and his belated request for authorization to accept the mandate for Armenia.

The prospect of an American mandate over Armenia was set back by the adamancy of Woodrow Wilson in his dealings with

³⁹ RG 256, 184.02101/5.

⁴⁰ RG 256, 184.02101/13.

the Republican-dominated Senate and the vindictiveness of the Senate majority spearheaded by Henry Cabot Lodge. In the postwar scheme of things, the assumption of mandates over former colonies or subject peoples of Germany and other defeated powers was to be under the aegis and on behalf of the League of Nations. The statutes (Covenant) of the League were embodied in the Versailles peace treaty with Germany, partly in the belief that the U.S. Senate would not dare reject that critical treaty. But Wilson miscalculated. He lacked the necessary two-thirds majority required for ratification and made no concessions to win over enough votes to carry the treaty and with it American adherence to the League of Nations. Rather, the Senate twice declined to ratify the Versailles treaty, killing any real possibility that the United States would assume the protectorate for Armenia.

Signals of Retreat

So long as there was a realistic possibility of an American mandate for Armenia, the European Allies did not strongly oppose the creation of a larger Armenian state that would include the six eastern Ottoman provinces, an outlet on the Black Sea, and perhaps even a port on the Mediterranean Sea. By late 1919, however, it was clear that the United States would not participate in drafting or become a signatory to the Turkish peace treaty. Hence, it was time for a strategic retreat, which conservative circles both in Great Britain and France had long advocated. As no one was willing to use armed force to remove the Turkish armies from the eastern provinces, certain concessions to the sultan's government, it was suggested, might strengthen its hand against Mustafa Kemal's Nationalists and make possible a reasonable settlement.⁴¹

Alarmed by these developments, Boghos Nubar and Aharonian appealed anew to the Allied Powers, reminding them of their pledges and promises to free Armenia from "the Turkish yoke." During a brief meeting at the end of November 1919, British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon bluntly told Boghos Nubar that

⁴¹ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 404-11, 426-37.

because an American mandate was now highly unlikely, it would not be possible to include Cilicia and a Mediterranean outlet in Armenia. He regretted that the Mudros Armistice had not stipulated the immediate military occupation of the Armenian provinces but maintained that a viable state could still be attained through the unification of the Erevan republic and the three eastern vilayets of Van, Bitlis, and Erzerum.⁴²

In a series of meetings between British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and French Premier Georges Clemenceau, December 11-13, 1919, it was decided to proceed with the Turkish treaty without the United States. A French position paper supported a reconstituted Armenian state but noted that, despite their antiquity, high civilization, and intelligence, the Armenians lacked political cadres and like the Jews were widely dispersed. They could not have all the land they were claiming, as this would disadvantage them, especially in view of their great losses since 1895. Hence, in Turkish Armenia they should have the basin of Lake Van, the plains of Bitlis and Mush, and the eastern sector of the province but not the city of Erzerum, with guaranteed rail connections to the sea. A British Foreign Office internal assessment of the French memorandum concurred that an Armenia from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea was no longer feasible but noted that in the eastern provinces the Muslim population, too, had been decimated by invasions, famine, and epidemics and there were sound ethnographic and strategic reasons to include the fortress city of Erzerum in Armenia.⁴³

That even the French position was not firm was demonstrated in January 1920 in an additional memorandum that suggested that the Armenian boundary be placed somewhere between Erzerum and Erzinjan to the west, with the new state guaranteed rail access to Batum, which should be made into a free port as had

⁴² Armenian National Delegation Archives, Minutes of Delegation of Integral Armenia, no. 59, Nov. 29, 1919; Avetis Aharonian, *Sardarapatits minchev Sevr ev Lozan* [From Sardarabad to Sèvres and Lausanne] (Boston: Hairenik, 1943), pp. 31-32.

⁴³ FO 371/4239, 167432/15167/44; published in Great Britain, Foreign Office, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 1st ser., ed. W.L. Woodward et al., 27 vols. (London: H.M.S.O., 1946-1985), vol. 4, pp. 942-56, cited hereafter as *British Documents*.

been done in the case of Danzig.⁴⁴ It was now Lloyd George who had qualms about awarding Erzerum to the Armenians. Circumventing Foreign Secretary Curzon, the prime minister asked the Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Montagu, to prepare the British observations on the French memorandum. The resulting document, expressing the views of the India Office and of the War Office under Winston Churchill, recommended easing the restrictions on Turkey further, including allowance for a regular standing army, forgoing reparations, and leaving the sultan in Constantinople. As to the eastern frontier, Montagu stressed that Erzerum should not be detached from Turkey: "Erzerum would be more of a commitment than a source of strength to Armenia. It has always been for the Turks a main defence against their traditional enemy, Russia, and deprivation of it would be a perpetual incentive to the Turks to attack the Armenians for its recovery." Hence, the boundary should run a few miles to the east of the city, thereby leaving the entire Araxes River Valley within Armenia.⁴⁵ This and other issues were taken up in formal Anglo-French negotiations in London from February to April 1920.

The London Conference

By the time that the Allied Supreme Council convened in London on February 12, Premier Georges Clemenceau had been voted out of office and succeeded by Alexandre Millerand, who now served both as premier and foreign minister. The London conference reiterated the view that the Allies were committed to the creation of an independent Armenia but that, because of the unwillingness of the United States to share in the responsibilities, there was no longer a question of a greater Armenian state but rather whether or not the smaller Armenian state should include the city and fortress of Erzerum and the port of Trebizond. Foreign Secretary Curzon acknowledged that the British military authorities had advised against the inclusion of Erzerum but insisted that, if that were to be the case, effective measures would be required to dis-

⁴⁴ FO 371/4239, 170654/15167/44; *British Documents*, vol. 4, pp. 1016-25.

⁴⁵ FO 371/4239, 172029/15167/44; *British Documents*, vol. 4, pp. 1036-42.

mantle all fortifications and establish a demilitarized buffer zone between Turkey and Armenia. French Assistant Foreign Minister Philippe Berthelot agreed that the existing Armenian republic around Erevan should serve as the nucleus of the new state, to which the Allies would award additional territories in the eastern Ottoman vilayets. The Allies would honor their obligations to the Armenians, even though so many of them had been massacred or deported that repopulation of the land was a serious problem. The fantasy of a greater Armenia had been encouraged by "the entourage of President Wilson," but fortunately even the Armenians now understood that they could not have Cilicia and much of the other territories originally claimed.⁴⁶

The London conference appointed a commission on February 17 to come up with specific recommendations on the future of the Armenian state inclusive of "the present *de facto* Independent Republic of Erivan and portions of the adjacent Turkish vilayets." Boghos Nubar and Avetis Aharonian appeared before the Armenia commission on February 21 to stress the strategic importance of Erzerum geographically, politically, militarily, and commercially. It was the hub of roads radiating in all directions and was vital for the defense of Armenia. Although the new state would have natural lines of defense in the north, east, and south, the western approach was the traditional avenue of invasion and could be protected only by Armenia's control of the mountainous salient extending beyond Erzinjan and Kemakh. If left in Turkish hands, Erzerum would serve as a base for aggression and become a festering grounds for pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic agitation. Placing the border west of Erzinjan and Kemakh would afford the Armenian army a strategic advantage in the face of a larger Turkish army. During this testimony, it became obvious that British commissioner Robert G. Vansittart was sympathetic to the Armenian arguments whereas French commissioner Albert Kammerer displayed strong skepticism regarding Armenian possession of the city of Erzerum.⁴⁷

In a second meeting with the Armenia commission on Febru-

⁴⁶ *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 42-43, 81-84.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87, 97-98; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 116/15, 132/31, 133/32, 234/133, and 241/140; Aharonian, *Sardarapatits*, pp. 39-40, 44-46.

ary 26, the Armenian spokesmen were accompanied by Patriarch Zaven, who supported Aharonian's attempt to expose the fallacy of using the terms "Turk" and "Moslem" interchangeably. Kurds, Kizilbashs, Lazs, Zazas, and Yezidis were often lumped together with Turks in misleading statistical tables, whereas these groups were distinct and in many ways alienated from the Turks and lived in general harmony with the Armenians. A memorandum submitted that day showed that some 800,000 Armenians would move into the Ottoman territories to be awarded the Armenian republic. They would migrate from all parts of the former Russian Empire, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Balkans, the Arab provinces, the United States, and from areas that were to be left within the Turkish state.⁴⁸

The Armenia commission, in its report to the London conference on February 27, ultimately recommended the award of Erzerum to Armenia. Because of the wartime decimation and dispersion of the Armenian people, however, its territory should not be too extensive so that the Armenian element might soon become preponderant. Strategically, it would have been desirable to include Trebizond and Erzinjan, but political and ethnographic considerations precluded this option. Rather, there should be a demilitarized zone between Turkey and Armenia, whose western boundary should run from the juncture of the Erzerum and Trebizond vilayets to the west of Baiburt into the Bitlis vilayet. The coast of Lazistan to the east of Trebizond could be made into an autonomous state under the nominal suzerainty of Armenia in order to allow Armenia to convert the passages from Baiburt into carriage roads to the small Black Sea harbors in that sector. Armenia should also have transit rights over the main road from Erzerum to Trebizond with export-import privileges at that major port. The commission cautioned, however, that nothing would be possible unless effective measures were taken to remove the Turkish armed forces from the area set aside for Armenia.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 118/17 and 234/133; Aharonian, *Sardarapatits*, pp. 47-51; FO 371/4952, E708/134/58.

⁴⁹ *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 268-69, 280-82; FO 371/4932, E1066/1/58, and, for a map of the suggested boundaries, FO 371/4953, E1123/134/58.

On March 24 the Armenia commission submitted a second report, which related to the future of the port of Batum and included the draft articles that would constitute the Armenia Chapter in the Turkish peace treaty. These required the Ottoman government to recognize the independence of Armenia and the cession to it of parts of the Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis, and Van vilayets.⁵⁰ When the London conference adjourned on April 10, major strides had been made toward completion of the Turkish treaty, yet many details and several policy issues were still outstanding. Although Foreign Secretary Curzon pressed for the summoning of the Turkish envoys at the earliest possible moment to receive the terms of peace, Lloyd George and Millerand wanted a little more time and therefore accepted the invitation of Italian Prime Minister Francesco Nitti to meet a few days later at San Remo on the Italian Riviera to conclude the deliberations.

The San Remo Conference

When the Allied leaders convened at San Remo on April 18, conditions in the Near East were becoming more and more troubling. Christians in Marash and elsewhere had again been massacred, and Armenian survivors and repatriates were again fleeing, this time from the Turkish Nationalist forces that owed their allegiance to Mustafa Kemal Pasha. The underlying problem was that the Allied Powers were unwilling, individually or collectively, to commit the requisite armed forces to implement the treaty they were drafting. They were fully aware that this was the case even as they weighed the merits of whether or not to award Erzerum to Armenia. Prime Minister Nitti, a very small voice in the previous meetings, now declared emphatically that the difficulties facing the Allies would only be compounded if Erzerum were given to Armenia. "It would not be necessary, no doubt, to declare war on Turkey to have the treaty executed, but in effect it would be necessary to wage it. To take Erzerum and to conduct a campaign in the middle of Anatolia would require big forces. The larger Armenia was to be, the greater would be its difficulties; more especially if Erzerum, which was not Arme-

⁵⁰ *British Documents*, vol. 7, pp. 639-49.

nian, were included." Lord Curzon stood alone at San Remo in reminding the heads of state of the pledges regarding the Armenian people and that "it was not possible to drop the matter entirely and leave Armenia in the lurch."⁵¹

The Allied divestiture of responsibility continued on April 20 when the military experts explained that it would take twenty-seven divisions to enforce the proposed Turkish treaty as it pertained to the Straits, Thrace, Smyrna, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and what was left of Turkey. Four divisions would be required to enforce the Armenia Chapter, but at present there were only twenty-two divisions, that is, enough for almost everything except Armenia. Now, Lloyd George exclaimed that the Armenians should be able to fight their own battle, just as the Greeks had done. They should be supplied with arms and equipment and given a fighting chance. "If they were not in a position to defend their own frontiers, then . . . there was no use for a nation of that kind in the world, and not one of the Allied Governments, in those circumstances, would be prepared to assist them to the extent of even a single battalion." Once again, it was Curzon who attempted to draw attention to the fact that the London conference had already decided that the expanse from Erzerum to Lake Van would be awarded to Armenia and that the new state would require external support in order to endure.⁵²

Between April 21 and 24 the San Remo conference was occupied with the proposed expansion of Greece to Gallipoli and the outskirts of Constantinople and its control of Smyrna. Nitti used Lloyd George's championing of the Greek cause to raise the need for concessions elsewhere, especially regarding Erzerum, which the Armenians could neither take nor defend; instead all there would be was another massacre. David Lloyd George concurred that it was "an extraordinary proposition" to ask the Armenians to conquer a vast territory when they could barely cling to their existing small state." Curzon could only reiterate that the London conference had considered the Erzerum question in detail and had concluded that leaving the strategic area to the Turks would make the survival of an independent Armenia

⁵¹ *British Documents*, vol. 8, pp. 48-49.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 54-67.

impossible. Both the League of Nations and the Armenian representatives had already been informed that Erzerum would be included in the future Armenian state. Lloyd George snapped that "the Armenians had really no right to indulge in unjustifiable hopes." Nitti, capitalizing on the split in the British delegation, warned that if the Turks were pressed too hard they would refuse to sign the treaty. The Allies should not give Armenia "something which, in her own interests, she had better not have." Curiously, it was now the French delegation that seemed to support Curzon.⁵³

Boghos Nubar and Avetis Aharonian, who were warned in private that the Allies would not assist in taking Erzerum, appeared before the Supreme Council at San Remo to assert that the Armenian army could occupy the area by its own means if given Allied moral, financial, and military support. Aharonian noted that the Armenian republic had defended itself valiantly for two years without receiving a single bullet from the West, so it was certainly capable of taking Erzerum if provided with weapons, uniforms, and instructors.⁵⁴ Erzerum was the natural capital of Armenia and dominated the entire plateau. A viable state was inconceivable without that strategic fortress city. After the Armenian delegates had withdrawn, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, as the head of the military experts, expressed grave doubt that the ill-equipped Armenian army could conquer any territory from an enemy force that controlled all the lines of communication. Berthelot, now repeating Curzon's arguments, argued that if the Turks refused to sign the treaty it would not matter whether Erzerum was awarded to Armenia, whereas if they did sign and the treaty became law, only irregular Turkish forces would remain to resist the Armenian army. Right would be on the side of the Armenians, and the Turks eventually would have to accept it. "If the treaty assigned Erzerum to Armenia, Armenia would at least have a legal title to it, and the law had some force of realisation in its very nature." Lloyd George replied that he did not want to seem to be unsympathetic, but the danger was that

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 89-94, 107-19, 123-26.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 116-18, 120-21; Aharonian, *Sardarapatits*, pp. 72-75; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, Files 132/31 and 235/134.

conferences lived in a world of illusions. Possession of Erzerum could not be decided in a conference. It would have to be taken by force, and blood would be spilled. If Armenia could not exist without Erzerum, then it should not exist at all.⁵⁵

The Allied leaders were annoyed that the Erzerum question had consumed so much of their time at San Remo. On April 24, Lloyd George suggested breaking the impasse by placing the responsibility for a decision on President Wilson. Unless the United States was willing to step in, the size of the Armenian state would have to be drastically reduced. Supported by Alexandre Millerand, the British prime minister proposed that the United States be asked to accept the mandate for Armenia and in any case to arbitrate whether Erzerum should be included in Armenia or be made into a neutral zone. This move, he explained, would force the Americans "to take a definite interest in Armenia's future." Dismissing Lord Curzon's arguments that the treaty could not be submitted to the Turkish government without definite boundaries, Lloyd George retorted that the boundaries would remain as they were, "that is confined to the Republic of Erivan," until President Wilson rendered a decision.⁵⁶

The next day, April 25, the Allied chiefs of state agreed in the first instance to ask the United States to accept the mandate for Armenia and in the second instance:

to invite the United States, in case of its unwillingness to assume the mandate, to arbitrate the boundaries, it being stipulated before-hand that Turkey, Armenia, and the other contracting parties would agree to refer to the president on the boundaries within the provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, Bitlis and Van, and accept in advance any decision as well as any stipulation regarding access to the sea for the independent state of Armenia.⁵⁷

By this decision, not only Erzerum but the entire western frontier of Armenia would be submitted to American arbitration. Such a strategy held the advantage of shifting responsibility for the specific territorial award from the European Allies to the

⁵⁵ *British Documents*, vol. 8, pp. 121-22, 138-39.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 156-58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78. See also RG 59, 180.03801/12.

United States. By allowing Wilson to grant Armenia more territory than either the Allied military or political leaders deemed prudent and defensible, the Supreme Council was acting, not to create a viable, united Armenian state, but rather to find excuses for its failure to do so. By the time the invitation was sent to Woodrow Wilson on April 26, 1920, the Allied divestiture of responsibility for Armenia was well advanced.⁵⁸ The Allies made no pretense that they actually expected the United States to shoulder the mandate or offer military support. They merely sought an American response in order to make it easier in the future to explain the nonfulfillment of their pledges regarding the Armenians. What is perhaps surprising is that Wilson took the bait. On May 17 he announced his personal acceptance of the invitation to serve as arbiter of the boundaries between Armenia and the residual Turkish state, expressing his abiding desire "to contribute to the welfare of the Armenian people."⁵⁹

With this turn of events, the drafting committee prepared the following article for inclusion in the Turkish treaty:

Turkey and Armenia as well as the other High Contracting Parties agree to submit to the arbitration of the President of the United States of America the question of the frontier to be fixed between Turkey and Armenia in the Vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van, and Bitlis, and to accept his decision thereupon, as well as any stipulation he may prescribe as to access for Armenia to the sea, and as to the demilitarisation of any portion of Turkish territory to the said frontier.

The Allied Powers had thus found the perfect escape hatch.

After repeated delays, the Turkish delegation representing the official government of Sultan Mehmed VI signed the Treaty of Sèvres on August 10, 1920, thereby recognizing the independence of Armenia and assuming the obligation to free women and children abducted or forcibly converted during the war, to coop-

⁵⁸ For the full communication to President Wilson, see *British Documents*, vol. 8, pp. 217-19, and *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1920*, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 779-83, cited hereafter as *FRUS, 1920*.

⁵⁹ *FRUS, 1920*, p. 783.

erate in the collection of evidence and prosecution of those responsible for the wartime atrocities, and to guarantee full religious and cultural freedom to the minorities remaining in Turkey.⁶⁰ Avetis Aharonian signed the treaty on behalf of the Republic of Armenia in what he described as the happiest day of his life. But the delay in completing the treaty for so long had given time for the Mustafa Kemal's resistance movement to consolidate, and the Turkish hero was now prepared to challenge both the sultan's government and the disunited and irresolute Allied Powers. In order to overturn the Treaty of Sèvres, it was essential to destroy the very nucleus of the projected Armenian state, that is, the Armenian republic in the Caucasus. To this end, he sought not only domestic but also foreign support, specifically that of another outcast regime, that of Soviet Russia, which was engaged in its own struggle for survival and hoped to use the prestige of Turkey in the Islamic world to arouse much of the colonial world against the adversarial powers of Great Britain and France.

"Wilsonian Armenia"

Although the Allied Supreme Council invited President Wilson in April 1920 to determine the western and southern boundaries of Armenia within certain limits, it was not until mid-July that the State Department began to assemble a team of experts for the assignment, and it was not until after the Treaty of Sèvres had been signed in August 1920 that the committee began its work. By that time, Woodrow Wilson, against the strong counsel of his closest political allies and even the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, had on May 24 belatedly submitted to Congress a request for authorization to assume the mandate for Armenia. But it was already a dead issue, and the reasons for

⁶⁰ The Armenia Chapter became Part III, Section VI, Articles 88-93 of the Treaty of Sèvres. See "Treaty of Peace between the British Empire and Allied Powers (France, Italy, Japan, Armenia, Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia, Greece, the Hedjaz, Poland, Portugal, Roumania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State) and Turkey—Sevres, August 10, 1920," in *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 113, ed. Edward Parkes et al. (London: H.M.S.O, 1923), pp. 672-73. For other relevant provisions, see pp. 681-85, 706-07.

Wilson's action are perplexing. Perhaps, he was so aware of the judgment of history that he wanted to go down on record as having done whatever possible for the Armenian people who were being abandoned, or he may have thought to make this an issue to take to the American people in a presidential election year. Whatever the case, the effect proved more harmful than good, and it took the Senate only a few days to hand the president a stinging rebuke by voting on June 1 to "respectfully decline" his request.⁶¹

Rejection of the Armenian mandate still left Wilson with the obligation to submit a decision on the borders. This assignment was undertaken by "The Committee upon the Arbitration of the Boundary between Turkey and Armenia," headed by Professor William Linn Westermann, who had been adviser on Near Eastern affairs to the U.S. delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, and including Major (Professor) Lawrence Martin of the Harbord mission and Harrison W. Dwight of the Near Eastern division of the State Department. The committee used as a guideline a combination of ethnic, religious, economic, geographic, and military factors and took advantage of the extensive documentation already gathered as well as direct interviews with General Harbord, missionaries, and others who had personal experience in the region. The primary objective was to draw such boundaries that would allow the Armenian element, when combined with the inhabitants of the small existing Armenian republic, to constitute half the total population at the outset and to become an absolute majority within a few years. As much as it may have wished to do so, the committee was unable to award any part of the Kharpert vilayet to Armenia because of the arbitration limits laid down by the Allied Supreme Council.⁶²

The "Full Report of the Committee upon the Arbitration of the Boundary between Turkey and Armenia" explained that less than half the territory claimed by the Armenians was being assigned, but Armenia was receiving as much of the four provinces as was consistent with strategic, economic, and ethno-

⁶¹ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 1-24.

⁶² For the records of the boundary committee, see US Archives, RG 59, File 760J.6715.

graphic considerations. Because the caravan route from Erzerum and Baiburt to Trebizond posed insurmountable difficulties for railroad construction, the Kharshut River Valley ending near the coastal town of Tireboli to the west of Trebizond was being included in order to make possible direct rail access to the sea. The map drawn by the committee followed a series of mountain ridges and water divides, leaving most of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, and Trebizond in Armenia. In the Erzerum vilayet, the boundary ran along the Kghi (Buyuk) River, a short distance to the east of the town of Kghi, northward to a point 35 kilometers or 22 miles southwest of Erzinjan and 6 kilometers or 4 miles east of Kemakh, and then to the meeting place of the Erzerum and Trebizond vilayets, about 40 kilometers or 25 miles northwest of Erzinjan. Hence, Baiburt, Mamakhhatun, and Erzinjan would fall within Armenia, whereas Kghi and Kemakh would remain in Turkey. The boundary continued into the Trebizond vilayet to the Black Sea at a point 9 kilometers or 6 miles east of the small port city of Kerasund (Giresun), thereby leaving the port of Trebizond and the coastline of Lazistan within Armenia. This territorial award would increase the area of the Republic of Armenia to about 155,000 square kilometers or 60,000 square miles. It was anticipated that after the return of the refugees and exiles Armenians would make up about 50 percent of the population and that this percentage would increase rapidly thereafter.⁶³

The report was submitted to the State Department at the end of September 1920, five months after the Supreme Council's request to President Wilson, but once again delays followed. It was not until November 22 that Woodrow Wilson signed the final report titled "Decision of the President of the United States of America Respecting the Frontier between Turkey and Armenia, Access for Armenia to the Sea, and the Demilitarization of Turkish Territory Adjacent to the Turkish Frontier." The text of the arbitration decision was cabled to the United States ambassador in Paris on November 24 and delivered to the Allied Supreme Council in early December.⁶⁴ By that time, however, the

⁶³ RG 59, 760J.6715/65.

⁶⁴ RG 59, 760J.6715/27/34/40/54/64/65/70/72. The text of Wilson's letter of transmission to the Supreme Council is in *FRUS*, 1920, pp. 790-95.

prospect of a united Armenian state with its southern and western boundaries extending into the provinces of Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, and Trebizond had been wiped away by the realities on the ground. Mustafa Kemal and Kiazim Karabekir effectively nullified the arbitration decision and the Treaty of Sèvres itself by rolling over the Caucasian Armenian republic.

Armenian-Soviet-Turkish Negotiations

As the Allied Supreme Council considered ways to escape from its commitments to the Armenians, Mustafa Kemal continued the process of creating a Turkish counter-government in Angora (Ankara), and Kiazim Karabekir began to prepare for military action against the Caucasian Armenian republic. First, however, it was essential to receive assurances of Soviet financial and military support. One of the earliest actions of Mustafa Kemal as president of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, which convened on April 23, 1920, was to address Lenin and the Soviet government in revolutionary terms with the offer of mutual cooperation. Soon thereafter he dispatched a delegation to Moscow to enter into direct negotiations.⁶⁵

The Armenian government, too, although intensely anti-communist, decided at the end of April 1920 that it could not avoid seeking a *modus vivendi* with a power that had defied the odds to emerge victorious in the Russian Civil War and was poised to flank the Caucasus Mountains to recover Baku and sovietize Azerbaijan. The three-person Armenian delegation headed by Levon Shant was instructed to gain Soviet recognition of an independent united Armenian state encompassing both the Russian-Armenian and the Turkish-Armenian provinces and permission for the thousands of Armenian refugees scattered throughout Russia to transfer with their movable belongings to the new Armenian state.

⁶⁵ Türk İnkilâp Tarihi Enstitüsü, *Atatürk'ün tamin, telgraf ve beyannameleri, 1917-1937* [Ataturk's Circulars, Telegraphs, and Declarations, 1917-1937] (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1961), pp. 304-05; Gotthard Jäschke, "Neues zur russisch-türkischen Freundschaft von 1919-1939," *Die Welt des Islams*, n.s., 6:3-4 (1961): 205-06.



Erzerum and the Boundaries of “Wilsonian Armenia,” 1920

In the first meeting between the Armenian delegation and Soviet officials in late May, Foreign Affairs Commissar Grigorii Chicherin stated that the Soviet government wished to reconcile Armenian and Turkish differences. This could be facilitated if Armenia relinquished false hopes founded on Western-imposed imperialistic terms for peace and accepted instead the good offices and mediation of Soviet Russia to reach a just solution. The Armenian spokesmen questioned how such mediation was possible when Mustafa Kemal was claiming not only all of the Turkish-Armenian provinces but also the Russian-Armenian districts of Kars and Ardahan. Chicherin let it be known that he favored the inclusion of Van and Bitlis in Armenia but found it difficult to justify the Armenian bid for Erzerum. Aside from historical and ethnographic considerations, the interests of the tillers of the soil had to be taken into account and, of course, in any mediation the interests of the Armenian workers would also be given their due. The future status of Erzerum was only one of several critical issues discussed in the Armenian-Soviet exchanges, which at first seemed productive but then at the end of June were abruptly interrupted by the Soviet side with the announcement that a Soviet delegation would soon depart for Erevan for direct negotiations with the Armenian government. The apparent real motive was to stall for time because of the impending arrival of Mustafa Kemal's envoys.⁶⁶

General Kiazim Karabekir was often at odds with Mustafa Kemal and chaffed under Kemal's egocentric, overbearing behavior. Still, he concurred with Kemal that the only way to save Turkey was through opening the Caucasus land-bridge between Anatolia and Russia by eliminating the three small independent republics that had emerged there following the collapse of imperial Russia. Azerbaijan had already become a Soviet republic at the end of April 1920, and in June 1920 Karabekir won the consent of the Angora government to deploy his armed forces into the province of Kars from Barduz to Merdenek and from Karaugan to Sarikamish. The offensive was soon postponed both

⁶⁶ Hambardzoum Terterian, "The Levon Chanth Mission to Moscow," *Armenian Review* 8:2-3 (1955): 3-22, 94-104; Rep. of Arm. Del. Archives, File 17/17; Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 46-62.

for technical reasons and because of the receipt by Mustafa Kemal of a Soviet reply to his initial communication. Foreign Affairs Commissar Chicherin expressed praise and support for the heroic Turkish liberation movement but also offered Soviet mediation between Armenia and Turkey to establish "clearly defined frontiers determined on the justice and the right of national self-determination." Because it was necessary to show good faith to the Soviet leaders, the Turkish offensive was postponed pending the results of direct Turkish-Soviet negotiations in Moscow.⁶⁷

The Turkish delegation led by Bekir Sami Bey arrived in Moscow in mid-July and immediately impressed upon Chicherin the need to open the overland Caucasus route for the safe delivery of arms and equipment to Anatolia. During the month-long negotiations, it became clear that the Soviets were prepared to offer Mustafa Kemal military and monetary assistance and to cooperate in other ways. From the Turkish perspective, the only major obstacle was in Chicherin's repeated argument that, in exchange for retaining all other territories of Turkish Armenia and even extending into the Kars district as far as Sarikamish for strategic reasons, the Angora government should be willing to allow the Armenian state to incorporate parts of the Van and Bitlis vilayets. An exchange of populations in these regions would ensure a just and separate existence for both Armenians and Turks. Bekir Sami was adamant in his rejection of the suggestion and in his assertion that he was not authorized to discuss boundaries or territorial matters. In the end, Lenin and Stalin apparently overruled Chicherin. A draft bilateral Soviet-Turkish treaty of friendship was signed on August 24, 1920, with attached military protocols and with no concessions to the Armenians. A member of Bekir Sami's delegation made his way back to Anatolia in September with the good news.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 2 (1958), pp. 554-55; Karabekir, *İstiklâl Harbimiz*, pp. 714-18.

⁶⁸ Yusuf Kemal Tengirşenk, *Vatan hizmetinde* [In Service of the Fatherland] (Istanbul: Bahar Matbaası, 1967), pp. 149-93; Ali Fuat Cebesoy, *Moskova hâtıraları* (21/11/1920—2/6/1922) [Moscow Memoirs (November 21, 1920-June 2, 1922)] (Istanbul: Vatan Neâriyati, 1955), pp. 61-74, 78-87; *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, vol. 3 (1959), p. 325n8.

Mustafa Kemal now had the assurances he needed and immediately issued the command to General Karabekir to advance into the province of Kars. At that time, the four divisions of the XV Army Corps had an estimated 25,000 officers, enlisted men, and mounted partisans. Karabekir began operations in the Barduz-Olti sector in mid-September and then launched an all-out attack on Sarikamish at the end of the month. By mid-October he had captured half of the province of Kars and driven the Armenians back to the complex of forts at Kars itself. That seemingly impregnable fortress fell at the end of the month amid Armenian confusion and abandonment, and in November the prostrate Armenian government had to sue for peace in the knowledge that not only Erzerum but all other lands of Turkish Armenia and probably much of Russian Armenia, too, would be lost.⁶⁹

At the same time, the Armenian leaders submitted to the inevitable choice between the lesser of two evils, and in negotiations with the Soviet delegation that had arrived in Erevan proclaimed Armenia to be a Soviet republic and relinquished its authority to the Revolutionary Committee of Soviet Armenia. In the agreement on the transfer of power, Soviet Russia pledged to restore the Armenian boundaries as they had been prior to the Turkish offensive, meaning that Soviet Armenia would have to repudiate the Treaty of Sèvres but at least gain back the half of Russian Armenia that had been occupied by the Karabekir's army. But the Soviet authorities soon voided this agreement and reneged on their pledge. Rather, in the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Moscow in March 1921, repeated in the Treaty of Kars in October between the Soviet republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and the Turkish government of the Grand National Assembly, nearly all the occupied Armenian territories were left to Turkey, thereby establishing the boundaries between the Republic of Turkey and the Soviet Union and currently between Turkey and the three again-independent Caucasian states. The Western powers, too, recognized these changes when in 1923 they made major concessions to Mustafa Kemal in the Treaty of Lausanne. The Treaty of Sèvres with its Armenia Chapter became

⁶⁹ Hovannisian, *Republic of Armenia*, vol. 4, pp. 180-202, 237-92.

a dead letter.⁷⁰

Thus ended the contest for Erzerum and the prospect of a united, independent Armenian state with Karin/Erzerum or Van as its capital.⁷¹ Unable to take by force what was given to them on paper, the Armenians once more had sought Western intervention and assistance, but as in the past the Western orientation produced nothing but blood and tears. The prosperous Armenian middle class of Karin and the industrious peasants of its plain would never return. The vivid memories of the exiles and refugees would gradually dim for their progeny, born, educated, and speaking other languages in lands near and far from Erzerum. Yet in strange and unexpected ways, Armenian Karin still reveals itself.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 373-408.

⁷¹ A final sad page in this saga was the fate of the Armenian prisoners of war, most of whom were captured at Kars and transferred on General Karabekir's orders to Erzerum. There, through the severe winter months of 1920-21, some 2,000 junior officers and enlisted men were subjected to hard labor and harsh living conditions, so that when at last the prisoners were released and sent to Soviet Armenia at the end of 1921 only 98 officers and 531 enlisted men still survived. See "Hayaget u hogevorakan gortsich Garegin Hovsepyani dzeragire" [The Manuscript of Armenologist and Spiritual Leader Garegin Hovsepian], ed. and intro. Bagrat A. Ulababyan, *Banber Hayastani Arkhivneri* 30:3 (1989): 125-58; Artashes Babalian, "Karsi ankume" [The Fall of Kars], *Hairenik Amsagir* 2 (April-May 1924): 54-65, 96-112; Karabekir, *Istiklâl Harbimiz*, p. 1024. See also FO 371/4962, E13827/134/58 encl.